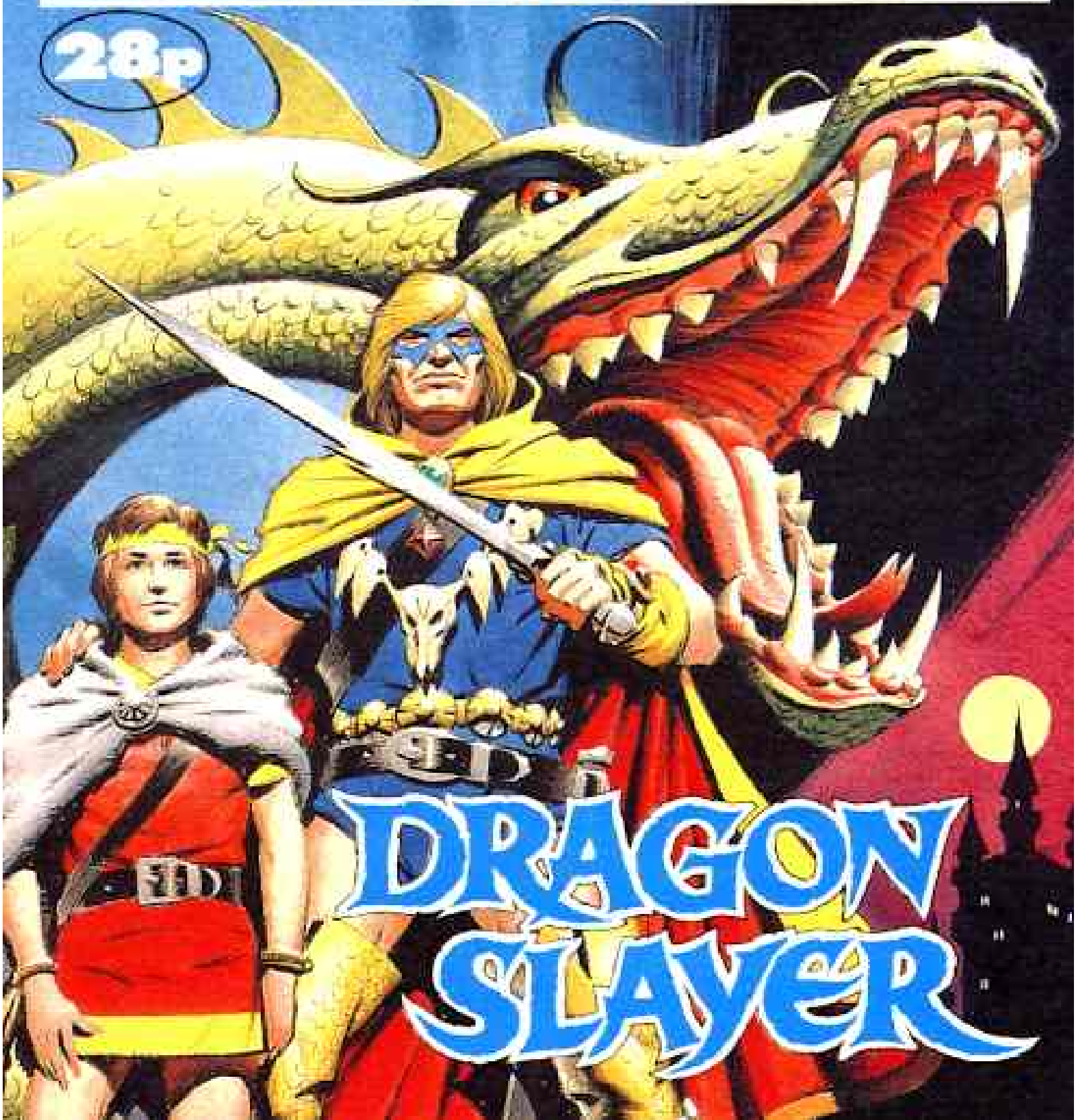
STARBLAZER

FANTASY FICTION IN PICTURES No. 210

28p



DRAGON SLAYER

DON'T FORGET THIS MONTH'S *OTHER*

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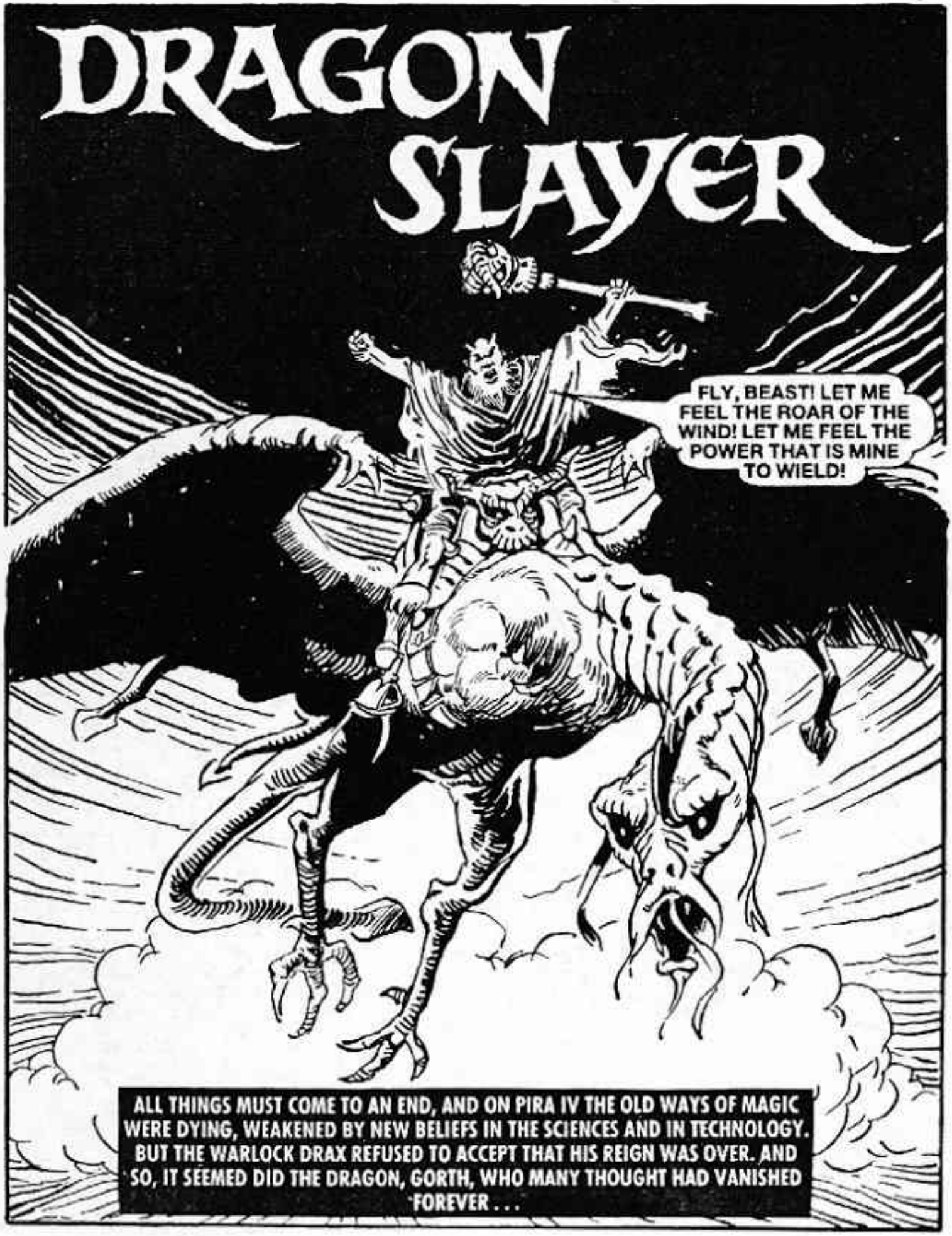

DRAGON SLAYER
FLY, BEAST! LET ME FEEL THE ROAR OF THE WIND! LET ME FEEL THE POWER THAT IS MINE TO WIELD!
ALL THINGS MUST COME TO AN END, AND ON PIRA IV THE OLD WAYS OF MAGIC WERE DYING, WEAKENED BY NEW BELIEFS IN THE SCIENCES AND IN TECHNOLOGY. BUT THE WARLOCK DRAX REFUSED TO ACCEPT THAT HIS REIGN WAS OVER. AND SO, IT SEEMED DID THE DRAGON, GORTH, WHO MANY THOUGHT HAD VANISHED FOREVER . . .

GORTH RETURNS! THE DOMES . . . RUN FOR THE DOMES!

FOOL! YOU CANNOT ESCAPE!

THE HEAT OF THE DEATH-BLAST WAS FELT BY ANTONUS AND HIS SON BIX . . .
QUICKLY, SON . . . THE DOMES ARE OUR ONLY PROTECTION.

THE DOMES WERE PROTECTIVE BUILDINGS CONSTRUCTED FROM THE ONLY MATERIAL ABLE TO WITHSTAND A DRAGON'S BREATH . . .
HURRY! WE MUST CLOSE THE SEALS!

BUT THE DRAGON CUT OFF FATHER AND SON FROM SAFETY.
WE'LL NEVER MAKE IT.
SUCH POWER . . . WHY WOULD A BEAST LIKE THAT NEED TO ALLY ITSELF WITH ONE SUCH AS DRAX?

BURN! BURN!
HEAR ME, PEOPLE OF PIRA! I HAVE RETURNED FROM THE EXILE YOU FORCED UPON ME! COWER IN YOUR DOMES FOR NOW! I SHALL RETURN!

EVEN AS HIS OMINOUS WORDS ECHOED, DRAX COMMANDED THE DRAGON TO CAUSE FURTHER DESTRUCTION . . .
BURN!

. . . AND THEN AS QUICKLY AS THE ATTACK BEGAN, IT WAS OVER.
HAVE THEY GONE, FATHER?
YES, MY SON . . . FOR NOW IT SEEMS THEY HAVE GONE . . .

THAT NIGHT ANTONUS CALLED A GATHERING OF THE VILLAGE COUNCIL . . .
IF WE SUBMIT, THEN DRAX WILL BE MASTER, OF COURSE, BUT AT LEAST WE SHALL LIVE! YOU, MORE THAN ALL OF US, WERE TODAY WITNESS TO THE POWER HE COMMANDS . . .
NO, MY FRIEND! I WAS WITNESS ONLY TO THE POWER OF THE DRAGON, GORTH! I SAW NO MAGIC! DRAX'S POWERS BELONG IN THE DARK AGE, AND ARE FADING! HIS ONLY MAGIC WAS IN USING GORTH TO STRIKE TERROR INTO YOUR HEARTS BECAUSE HE CANNOT DO SO HIMSELF! BELIEVE ME, RID YOURSELVES OF THE DRAGON AND YOU WILL BE RID OF DRAX!
A BRAVE PROCLAMATION, ANTONUS. WHO WOULD YOU HAVE ACHIEVE IT?
THERE IS ONE MAN . . . THE DRAGON SLAYER.

ENOUGH, ANTONUS! THE DRAGON SLAYER IS LONG DEAD, AS MUCH A PART OF THE DARK AGE AS THE OLD WAYS YOU WOULD HAVE US FORGET!
IT WOULD BE A FOOL'S JOURNEY, IN SEARCH OF SOMETHING THAT IS DUST. AND IF YOU ARE WRONG, ANTONUS, WHAT THEN — AS SOON AS YOU SET FOOT IN THE FORGOTTEN LANDS WOULD NOT DRAX SIMPLY STRIKE YOU DOWN?
I HAVE HEARD TALES THAT HE STILL LIVES, WITHIN THE FORGOTTEN LANDS. I AM WILLING TO SEEK HIM OUT . . . ASK FOR HIS HELP . . .
BUT WHAT IF HE *IS* RIGHT? WHAT HAVE YOU GOT TO LOSE? IF DRAX IS WEAK, THEN THE DEATH OF GORTH WILL SEE AN END TO HIM. AND IF HE ISN'T, THEN HE WILL SEE AN END TO MY FATHER. BUT YOU WILL SURVIVE.

BIX'S WORDS MADE THE COUNCIL CONSIDER FURTHER—
VERY WELL, ANTONUS. WE SHALL GRANT YOU SEVEN DAYS TO SEEK HELP AND KILL THE DRAGON, GORTH.
I SHALL LEAVE AT SUNRISE.

BUT THE FOLLOWING MORNING, AS ANTONUS PREPARED FOR HIS JOURNEY—
YOU ARE A PERCEPTIVE MAN, ANTONUS OF PIRA. MY POWERS ARE WEAK, AND GROWING WEAKER BY THE DAY. BUT GORTH WILL BE MY NEW POWER AND YOU WILL NOT STOP ME NOW. I AM STILL CAPABLE OF FINISHING YOU WHERE YOU STAND . . .

BEFORE ANTONUS COULD REACT, A HAND OF OCCULT FORCE GRIPPED HIM.

STATUE-SHROUD . . . ALREADY STIFFENING!
I'LL GET IT OFF YOU!
NO GOOD! BIX, LISTEN TO ME . . . I'M TRAPPED HERE NOW . . . YOU MUST GO IN MY PLACE . . . FIND THE DRAGON SLAYER . . .
NO, I WON'T LEAVE YOU!
YOU MUST! HURRY, OR HE'LL TRAP YOU TOO!

I'LL BE BACK!
HURRY, BEAST!

FIND HIM, MY SON . . . FIND THE DRAGON SLAYER . . .
FAR AWAY—
YES . . . FIND HIM, BOY. THE DRAGONSLAYER CAN PERISH SOON ENOUGH. YES, COME TO THE FORGOTTEN LANDS, FOR I HAVE MADE IT MY DOMAIN. COME . . . I SHALL BE WAITING . . .

AS TWILIGHT HUNG ITS BLUE-GREY BLANKET OVER THE NOTHINGNESS—
THERE, THE BOUNDARIES . . .

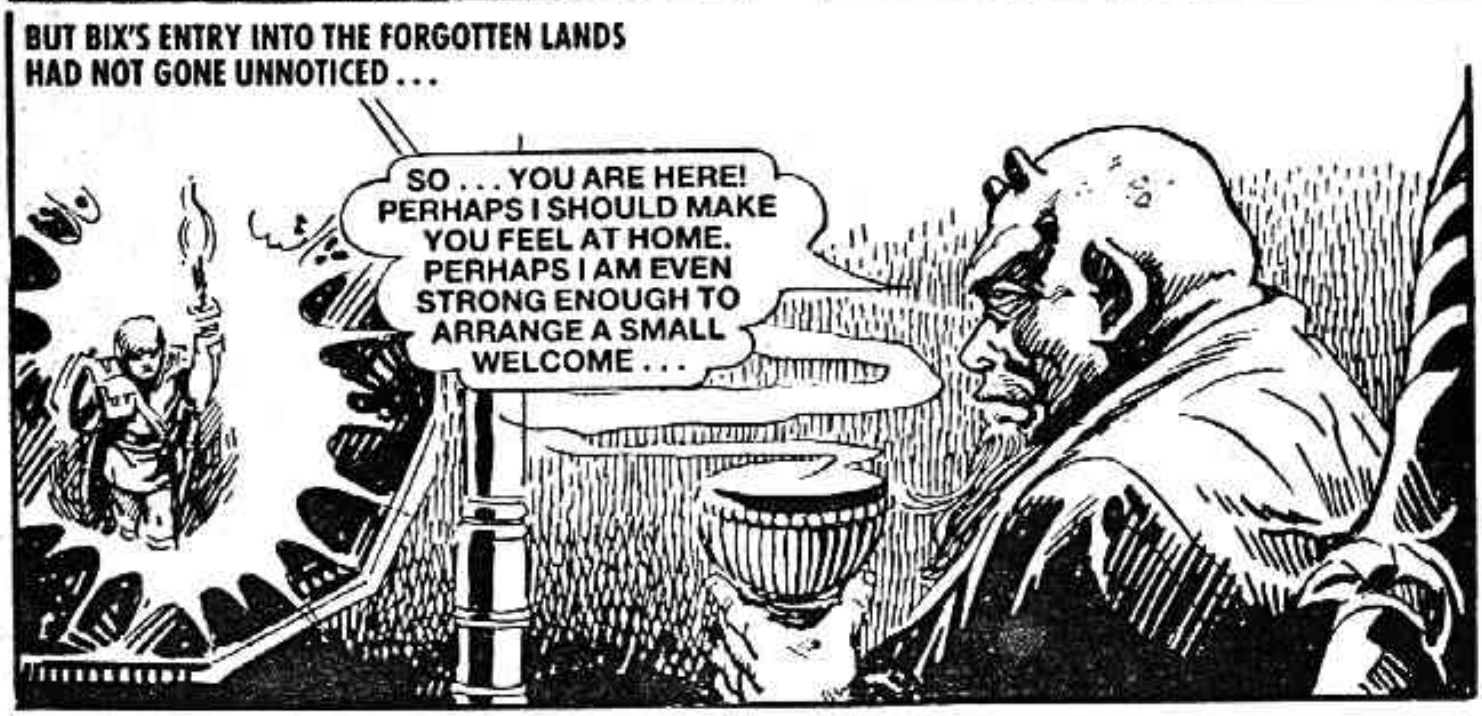
. . . THE FORGOTTEN LANDS!

THE FORGOTTEN LANDS — A PART OF THE WORLD THAT WAS OLD WHEN EVERYTHING ELSE WAS YOUNG. ONCE THE HEART OF A PLANET STEEPED IN MAGIC, THEY WERE ALL THAT WAS LEFT. BUT STILL THE LAST STIRRINGS OF THE OLD MAGIC COULD BE FELT . . . IN THE EARTH, IN THE TREES, IN THE ROCKS . . . STILL IT LINGERED IN THE AIR . . .
EASY, BOY . . . I FEEL IT, TOO . . . A TINGLING . . . THIS MUST BE HOW THE MAGIC FEELS.

BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY. YOUR JOB IS DONE. YOU GO NO FURTHER.

GO HOME. FROM HERE I GO ON ALONE.

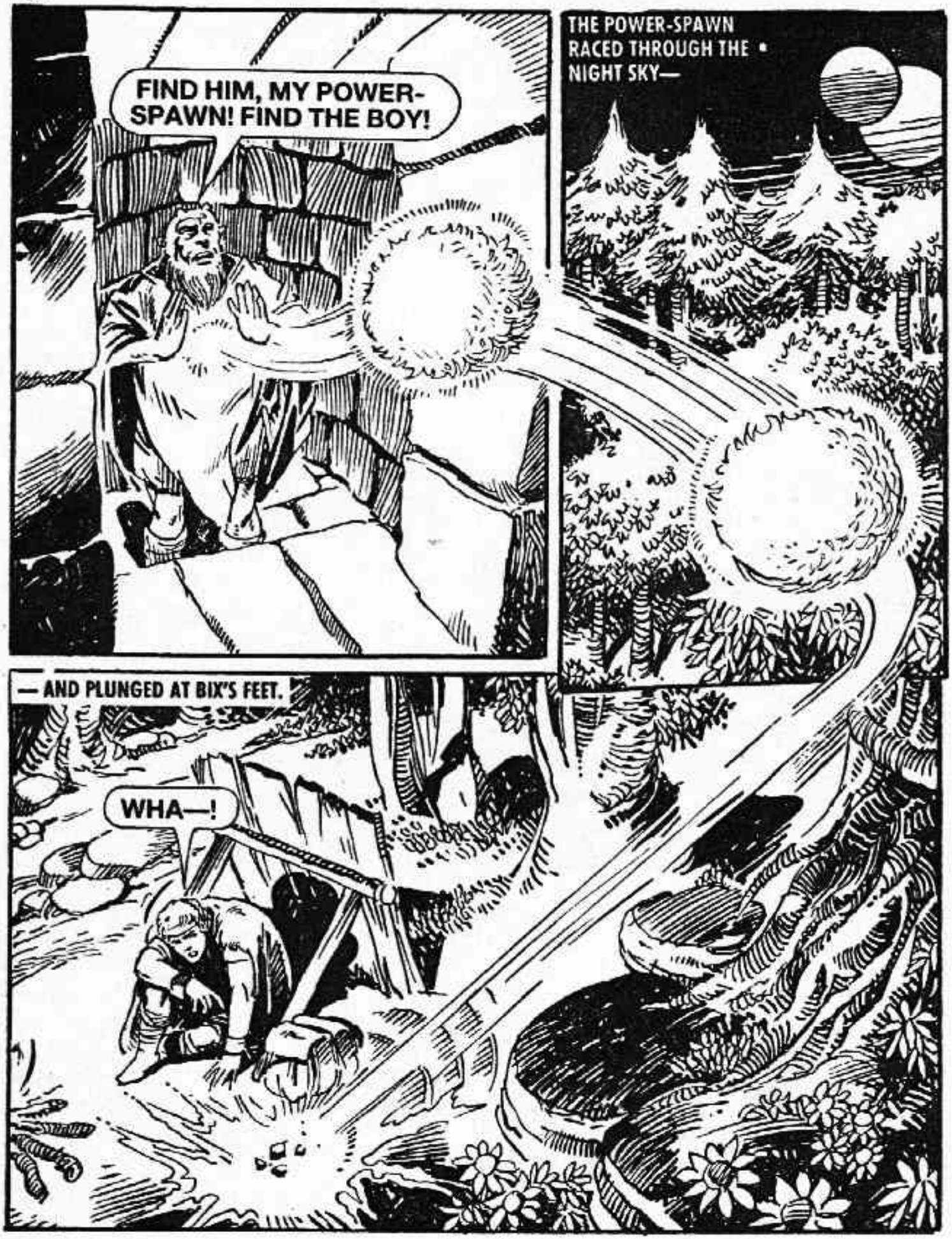
THE BEAST DEPARTED, AND BIX HEADED DEEP INTO THE FOREST.
I HAVE STRUGGLED FAR ENOUGH. I'LL MAKE CAMP FOR THE NIGHT.


BUT BIX'S ENTRY INTO THE FORGOTTEN LANDS HAD NOT GONE UNNOTICED . . .
SO . . . YOU ARE HERE! PERHAPS I SHOULD MAKE YOU FEEL AT HOME. PERHAPS I AM EVEN STRONG ENOUGH TO ARRANGE A SMALL WELCOME . . .

IT'S GETTING DARKER AND COLDER. I'LL BE GLAD OF THIS FIRE.
DRAX PREPARED HIS SMALL WELCOME—
. . . KALIBAR . . . KARISTA . . . KOLKAS . . . POWER OF THE LANDS COME TO ME . . . KOLKAS . . . KARISTA . . . KALIBAR . . . POWER . . . COME . . . TO . . . ME . . .

YES . . .YES!

BIX SAT, UNAWARE OF WHAT WAS IN STORE.
EVERYTHING'S SO QUIET AND STILL. NO MOVEMENT ANYWHERE, NOT EVEN A WIND. I WONDER IF THE DRAGON SLAYER DOES EXIST?


FIND HIM, MY POWER-SPAWN! FIND THE BOY!
THE POWER-SPAWN RACED THROUGH THE NIGHT SKY—
— AND PLUNGED AT BIX'S FEET.
WHA—!

THE EARTH . . . MOVING . . .
BIX TRIED TO DEFEND HIMSELF.
THIS CAN ONLY BE SORCERY!
UUURGH!

BUT THE MORE BIX STRUGGLED, THE STRONGER THE GROWTH BECAME—
HELP!
CAN'T ESCAPE!

HELP ME!
SWISH!
SUDDENLY, FROM OUT OF THE DARKNESS . . .

YOUR HAND, LAD . . .
GIVE ME YOUR HAND!
I'LL CUT YOU FREE!

THE STRANGER MADE QUICK WORK OF THE CLUTCHING VEGETATION . . .
KEEP BEHIND ME! DO NOT STRAY FROM THIS PATH.

SOON . . .
WHO ARE YOU?

A NECKLACE OF DRAGON'S TEETH . . . IT'S HIM . . . THE DRAGON SLAYER!
BUT BEFORE BIX COULD SAY ANYTHING . . .
UUNN!
FOOLISH BOY!

BACK IN DRAX'S STRONGHOLD—
I'VE LOST THE BOY! I CAN NO LONGER TRACK HIM BY HIS EMANATIONS OF FEAR. ANOTHER PRESENCE IS THERE. I HAVE FELT IT BEFORE . . . THE DRAGON SLAYER.

BUT THE CREATION OF THE POWER-SPAWN HAS WEAKENED ME . . . AT SUNRISE I MUST USE OTHER MEANS. PREPARE, DRAGON SLAYER, FOR TOMORROW I SHALL SHOW YOU MY REAL POWER . . .

. . . AT SUNRISE GORTH WILL FLY AGAIN!

THE FOLLOWING MORNING . . .
LISTEN CAREFULLY! I SHALL NOT ATTACK YOU AGAIN. I DID SO LAST NIGHT BECAUSE YOU WERE AFRAID — AND IT WAS BECAUSE OF YOUR FEAR THAT DRAX WAS ABLE TO SEEK YOU OUT AND DO WHAT HE DID. NOW . . . WE MUST TALK FURTHER. COLLECT YOUR THOUGHTS AND JOIN ME WHEN YOU ARE READY . . .
A FEW MINUTES LATER . . .
YOU ARE ON YOUR FEET. GOOD. TELL ME—
WHAT KIND OF SWORD IS THAT?
— WHY ARE YOU HERE?

BIX RECOUNTED HIS STORY TO THE DRAGONSLAYER —
I CANNOT HELP YOU.
THE DRAGONSLAYER RECOUNTED HIS OWN STORY. IT WAS A TALE OF THE OLD WORLD . . .
A LONG TIME AGO, FOR I AM OLDER THAN YOU IMAGINE, THE SKIES OF PIRA IV WERE FULL OF GORTH'S KIND. THEY, LIKE THE WARLOCKS, WERE CREATURES OF THE MAGIC — SPAWNED HERE IN THE FORGOTTEN LANDS BY FORCES NOT MEANT TO BE UNDERSTOOD . . .
. . . THE DRAGONS PREYED ON MAN BECAUSE THAT WAS THEIR WAY . . . OUR KIND AND THEIRS WERE NATURAL ENEMIES . . .

. . . WE DRAGON SLAYERS WERE MEN LIKE YOU, WHO FOUGHT BACK. MANY DRAGONS WERE SLAIN, MANY DRAGON SLAYERS KILLED. FOR GENERATIONS THE WAR WAS WAGED . . .

MY NAME WAS GOLTHOS KIM, AND I WAS TRAINED FROM BIRTH FOR THE WAR. BUT IN MY FIRST BATTLE I WAS CAUGHT IN THE DRAGON'S BREATH — THAT FOUL MIX OF GASES FROM WHICH A DRAGON CREATES FIRE — AND LEFT TO DIE . . .

. . . BUT INSTEAD OF DYING, I RECOVERED TO FIND MYSELF CHANGED. SOMETHING IN THE DRAGON'S BREATH HAD TOUCHED ME WITH THE MAGIC. AND AS MY FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES GREYED AND DIED WITH THE PASSING OF THE YEARS, I GREW ONLY SLIGHTLY OLDER . . . I HAD BEEN BLESSED WITH THE LIVES OF TEN MEN . . .

ON AND ON I FOUGHT, NEW COMRADES RISING AND FALLING BY MY SIDE, HONING AND PERFECTING MY SKILLS UNTIL I BECAME KNOWN AS THE ONE, THE ULTIMATE DRAGONSLAYER. I BECAME LEGEND.

BUT THE WORLD WAS CHANGING. THE MAGIC WAS DYING AND WITH IT THE DRAGONS WERE VANISHING FOREVER. FINALLY THERE CAME A DAY WHEN I WAS THE LAST DRAGON SLAYER AND THERE WAS ONE LAST DRAGON LEFT TO SLAY . . . THAT WAS THE ONE YOU KNOW AS GORTH . . .
WE CAME FACE TO FACE, EACH REALISING IN OUR OWN WAYS THAT WE WERE THE LAST OF OUR KIND. WE COULD NOT KILL EACH OTHER. WE WANTED ONLY TO LIVE THE REST OF OUR DAYS IN PEACE . . .
DO YOU UNDERSTAND, LAD?

YES, I UNDERSTAND! BUT THAT HAS CHANGED! GORTH HAS BECOME A KILLER ONCE MORE . . . DRAX IS USING HIM TO GAIN POWER . . . HE MUST BE SLAIN!
NO! IT IS IMPOSSIBLE! GORTH WOULD NEVER . . .
THE DRAGON SLAYER'S KEEN EARS PICKED-UP A DISTANT SOUND . .
LISTEN . . . DO YOU HEAR THAT?
GORTH!

NOW DO YOU BELIEVE?
COWER, DRAGON SLAYER, FOR GORTH HAS FOUND YOU! COWER, BOY, FOR THE HOPES OF YOU AND YOUR FATHER DIE HERE!

DIVE, BEAST! BURN THEM WITH YOUR FIRE! BURN! BURN!
GET UNDER COVER, LAD. THERE IS NOTHING YOU CAN DO . . .

THE DRAGON SLAYER WAS SWEPT ASIDE —
OOOOF!
WHY IS GORTH ATTACKING? WE HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING!
MY SHIELD . . . MUST REACH MY SHIELD . . .

DRAGON SLAYER REACHED HIS SHIELD JUST IN TIME—

DRAGON SLAYER STRUCK BACK—
KILL HIM!

GORTH GRABBED DRAGON SLAYER IN HIS FIERCE TALONS
EVEN AS GORTH CRUSHED DRAGON SLAYER, THE AGELESS WARRIOR STRUCK.

YIIEE!
AAAH!
BIX RACED TO PROTECT THE FALLEN DRAGON SLAYER . . .
NO!
FOR A MOMENT, TIME WAS FROZEN AS THE EYES OF GORTH AND THE DRAGON SLAYER MET . . .
KILL THEM!

THEN GORTH BELCHED OUT FIRE —

GORTH LET OUT A STRANGE, EERIE WAIL —
NOW NO ONE STANDS BEFORE ME! YOU HAVE DONE WELL, BEAST!
LEAVE THEIR REMAINS TO THE VERMIN!
ONCE GORTH HAD GONE —
I SAW IT IN HIS EYES! HE WOULD NOT KILL US! HE AIMED AT THE CENTRE OF MY SHIELD — SO THAT THE FIRE DEFLECTED AROUND US.

ON THE EVENING OF THE FOLLOWING DAY THEY ARRIVED AT THEIR DESTINATION, A BLACK CAVE-MOUTH THAT LOOMED OMINOUSLY OT OF A GROWING MIST . . .

THE DRAGONFIRE WAS AN UNDERGROUND SEA OF MYSTICAL FLAME THAT HAD BURNED SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME.
A VAST EMPTINESS, AND COOLING ROCK! MY FEARS ARE CONFIRMED, LAD — THIS IS WARLOCK'S WORK . . .
BUT IS IT POSSIBLE TO EXTINGUISH THE DRAGONFIRE?
WHILE GORTH STILL LIVES, THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE. THE DRAGONFIRE STILL BURNS, BUT IN A PLACE OF DRAX'S CHOOSING, UNDER HIS CONTROL. THAT IS WHY GORTH SERVES THE WARLOCK, LAD . . . HE HAS NO CHOICE . . .
I SAID I WOULD HELP YOU, BIX, AND HELP YOU I WILL. BUT THE DRAGON HAS SPARED MY LIFE AND NOW I MUST SPARE HIS.
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

JOURNEY TO DRAX'S STRONGHOLD AND FREE THE DRAGONFIRE! GORTH WILL NOT HARM YOU THEN . . .
THEN I'LL COME WITH YOU.
THERE WILL BE MANY DANGERS, LAD. DRAX WILL USE EVERYTHING IN HIS POWER TO STOP US.
THEN, SO BE IT!

YOU HAVE COURAGE, LAD! TAKE THIS SWORD. ONCE BEFORE, LONG AGO, I CAME HERE AND FORGED THIS AND MY SWORD IN THE FLAMES OF THE DRAGONFIRE. THEIR BLADES ARE STRENGTHENED BY ITS MAGIC. IT WILL SERVE YOU WELL. NOW COME . . . WE HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO . . .
IF THAT HAPPENS, I'LL BE READY . . .

MEANWHILE, IN THE STRONGHOLD OF DRAX.
THIS NIGHT SHALL BE THE LAST NIGHT OF MY EXILE. TOMORROW THE DRAGON WILL CARRY ME OUT OF THE FORGOTTEN LANDS FOREVER. THEN I SHALL BEGIN MY NEW REIGN . . . TOMORROW . . . TOMORROW!

THE DRAGONFIRE WILL REMAIN, CONTAINED WITHIN THIS FORCE-SPHERE! IF THE DRAGON HAS NEED, HE MAY RETURN HERE TO STRENGTHEN HIMSELF FROM IT . . . BUT ONLY IF HE CONTINUES TO SERVE ME WELL.

BUT THE MENTAL POWERS I NEED TO KEEP THE SPHERE INTACT ARE TIRING. I MUST REST NOW . . . REGAIN MY ENERGY . . .

AS DRAX RETIRED TO HIS CHAMBERS . . .

'TIS EMPTY!

WHICH WAY DO WE GO?

DOWN! I SAW LIGHTS BELOW AS WE CLIMBED. AND BE CAREFUL AND QUICK — DRAX IS PROBABLY GUARDED.

MEANWHILE . . .
DRAGON SLAYER — HERE!
LISTEN . . .
THE ROAR OF FLAME . . . COME ON!
DRAGONFIRE!

YES . . . DRAGONFIRE. YOU SURPRISE ME, I THOUGHT YOU DEAD! WELCOME TO MY STRONGHOLD!
DRAX'S WATCHER DROPPED FROM ABOVE . . .
DRAGON SLAYER . . . AARRGH!

YOU CANNOT HELP THE BOY, DRAGON SLAYER . . . YOU HAVE PROBLEMS OF YOUR OWN. THEIR BITE IS QUITE DEADLY . . .
YOUR SWORD, BIX . . . USE YOUR SWORD!
BIX AND THE DRAGON SLAYER FOUGHT BACK-TO-BACK.

AND FINALLY, VICTORY WAS GAINED . . .
NOW, DRAX . . . WE HAVE COME FOR THE DRAGONFIRE . . .
I DOUBT IT!

DRAX ACTIVATED A TRAP-DOOR —
AAARGHH . . .

BIX AND THE DRAGON SLAYER CRASHED INTO THE DEPTHS . . .
MY LEG . . .
AND AS DRAX'S VOICE ECHOED FROM ABOVE THEM, THEY ONCE AGAIN FACED GORTH . . .
GORTH . . . DESTROY THEM!
GORTH'S SHACKLES MAGICALLY FREED THEMSELVES AND THE DRAGON MOVED FORWARD . . .
GORTH! LISTEN! WE ARE HERE TO HELP . . . TO FREE THE DRAGONFIRE! HELP US!

NO GOOD . . . HE HAS NO CHOICE!

THE DRAGON SLAYER LEAPT INTO ACTION . . .
AND SO I HAVE NO CHOICE . . . I MUST FIGHT . . .

DRAGON AND DRAGON SLAYER LOCKED IN COMBAT —

WHY DO YOU FIGHT ME? WE HAVE A TRUCE!

BUT IN THE CONFINED SPACE OF GORTH'S CELL, THE DRAGON SLAYER WAS TRAPPED.
SO IT ENDS AFTER ALL THESE YEARS . . .

THE DRAGON SLAYER MADE ONE LAST ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE.
UNLESS . . .!

GORTH!

THE EYES OF DRAGON AND DRAGON SLAYER MET FOR A FINAL TIME, AND THEN —
AAAHH . . .!

DRAGON AND MAN PLUNGED FROM THE WINDOW.
DRAGON SLAYER! NO!
DRAX WATCHED THE COMBATANTS FALL . . .
YOU ARE ALONE NOW, BOY! AND FOR WHAT YOU HAVE CAUSED TO HAPPEN I. . . WILL . . . MAKE . . . YOU . . . SUFFER . . .!!!

BIX REACTED INSTINCTIVELY BY THROWING HIS SWORD.
NO . . .

YOU WILL DIE, BOY . . . DIE . . .

THE DRAGONFIRE . . . MUST REACH THE DRAGONFIRE . . .

ONCE IN THE DRAGONFIRE CHAMBER . . .
THE DRAGON SLAYER SAID THE BLADE WAS STRENGTHENED BY THE MAGIC . . . MAYBE IT WILL COUNTERACT THE MAGIC OF THE FORCE-SPHERE . . .

IT DID —
YES!

BUT DRAX HAD SUMMONED WHAT REMANINED OF HIS POWER.
DRAX'S POWER-BOLT BLEW OUT THE WALL BEHIND BIX, LEAVING HIM BALANCED ON THE EDGE OF A PRECIPICE . . .
GORTH IS GONE, DRAX . . . YOU HAVE POWER NO MORE . . .
POWER ENOUGH FOR YOU, BOY . . . POWER ENOUGH FOR YOU . . .

BUT GORTH AND THE DRAGON SLAYER HAD SURVIVED . . .

WHAT!!

GORTH . . . NO! — AAEEIIEEE!
WITH THE DRAGONFIRE FREED, GORTH HAD NO MASTER.
QUICKLY, LAD . . . WE MUST PUT DISTANCE BETWEEN US AND THIS PLACE!

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